**Roundtables (Open Discussions)**

Although not the most informal meeting available, the roundtable is a true open discussion, the mainstay of group interaction. It is used to complement most meetings, such as panels, symposiums, role-playing sessions, or buzz sessions. The roundtable discussion is also used for decision-making meetings and parent councils. In a roundtable discussion, all members are encouraged to participate throughout the meeting. Care must be taken to promote good communication among all members of the group. To facilitate good group interaction, leaders should keep in mind the following suggestions from the Denver Public Schools:

1. Have a clear understanding of the topic as defined by the group.
2. Obtain materials.
3. Get a general knowledge, through reading, to be able to direct and add to the contributions from the group.
4. Be sure to plan an introduction that will stimulate interest of the group.
5. Prepare a logical, progressive list of questions to start the ball rolling and keep it moving.
6. Keep the discussion on track; keep it always directed, but let the group lay its own track to a large extent. Don't groove it narrowly yourself.
7. Be alert to adjust questions to needs of group-omit, change, reword.
8. Remember-the leader's opinion doesn't count in the discussion. Keep your own view out of it. Your job is to get the ideas of others out for airing.
9. If you see that some important angle is being neglected, point it out: "Bill Jones was telling me last week that he thinks .... What do you think of that?"
10. Keep spirits high. Encourage ease, informality, good humor. Let everybody have a good time. Foster friendly disagreement. Listen to all ideas with respect and appreciation, but stress what is important and turn discussion away from what is not.
11. Take time every 10 minutes or so to draw loose ends together: "Let's see where we've been going." Be as fair and accurate in summary as possible. Close the discussion with a summary-your own or the secretary's.
12. Call attention to unanswered questions for future study or for your reference back to speakers. Nourish a desire in group members for continuing study and discussion through a skillful closing summary.

Problems that could emerge in a roundtable meeting include domination of the discussion by one or two members, withdrawal from the group and side discussions by two or three people, or lack of preparation by the members. Good leadership makes it possible to avoid these pitfalls. If the leader is prepared for the meeting and if members come to the meeting prepared, have relevant experiences, or have background expertise on the subject, the meeting can be a most effective means of changing attitudes and educating members. It allows all members to contribute and become involved in discussion, clarification of issues, and decision making,

**Arrangements before the Meeting**

1. Select a topic for open discussion and announce it to the membership.

2. Provide members with materials and bibliography.

a. Duplicate and distribute background information on the topic through a distribution

system or at a meeting before the roundtable.

b. Select members to read relevant material before the meeting.

c. Come to the meeting well prepared and ready to guide but not dominate.

**Setup**

1. Arrange chairs in a circle or semicircle or around tables so that all participants can see each other and eye contact is possible.

2. Check the room for comfort-ventilation, lighting, and heat.

**Procedure**

l. The leader starts the meeting with a thought- provoking question or statement of fact. Throughout the discussion, the leader tries to keep the meeting from wandering. Before the meeting, the leader has prepared a list of questions or statements that may keep the discussion moving forward.

2. During the meeting, the leader avoids dominating the discussion. Instead, the leadership role brings others into the discussion, helps clarify, and keeps the meeting on the topic.

3. The leader summarizes at the conclusion.

4. If the members want to take action on the conclusions, the leader should call for appropriate action, help the group make plans, and assign tasks.

**Appropriate Topics**

1. Learning activities that work

2. Behavior and misbehavior

3. Influence of Internet, videogames, and television on children

4. Rivalry between brothers and sisters

5. Problem solving

6. Bullying in the schools.

**Concentric Circles**



The concentric-circle arrangement is a variation of the open discussion or roundtable meeting. Instead of one circle, there are two-one inside the other-with everyone facing the center. The dialogue among members is similar to that of the open discussion, only the smaller circle within the larger circle contains the communicators at first. Divide the group so that the smaller group has six to 12 people. The members of the smaller group discuss the issue; those in the larger group listen to the discussion. After a designated time of five to 10 minutes, the meeting is opened to the entire group. If you have 24 to 30 people, with people who are reticent in a large group, the concentric circle will help solve the problem. Those within the inner circle form a small group with which to interact. This arrangement precipitates more discussion from them and succeeds in getting the total group interested in the discussion. Those sitting in the outer circle are required to listen, but the statements, questions, and ideas offered usually promote their interest as they listen. This method is surprisingly effective in getting groups to discuss. By the time the discussion is opened up to the entire group, many ideas have emerged.

**Setup**

1. Arrange chairs with one large circle on the outside and a smaller circle within the larger circle.

**Procedure**

1. The leader of the total group may request a volunteer leader for the inner circle, or the leader may take that role.

2. The session is started with a statement or question to promote interest and dialogue.

3. The inner circle discusses the topic, using a small-group, open-discussion format. The outer circle listens. At the end of a designated period (for example, six minutes), the discussion may be opened to all in the room. At that time, the leader continues to control the meeting but does not dominate it.

4. For variation, reverse the roles. Those now in the outer circle move to the inner circle and have the opportunity for more-involved discussion, while those from the outer circle listen to this discussion. A separate issue or different questions concerning one issue may be used for each group in its discussion.

**Appropriate Topics**

1. How to build self-esteem in children
2. What to expect of 2-, 3-, 4-, or 5-year-olds
3. Problem solving
4. Living with change
5. Positive uses of the Internet, video games, and television
6. Courses and workshops that could be offered at school
7. Issues and concerns of children

**Buzz Sessions**

Buzz sessions are an excellent means of eliciting participation from all members of the group. They must be small enough to allow interaction among all participants. The smallest session consists of two people, and the maximum size should be six to eight. This makes it possible for all members to have the chance to express their opinions easily. Even in a large group, the audience can divide into smaller groups and discuss. The latter is called a 6-6 discussion, with six people discussing for six minutes. Because the session time is limited, it does not allow thorough examination of issues, but it does bring forth ideas from all involved in a very short period of time-an objective that is not accomplished in an open discussion with a large group.

**Setup**

1. Up to 24 people.

a. Arrange chairs in a circle or semicircle.

b. When the smaller group session is to begin, six people turn their chairs together to form their group. It is also possible for a group to move to another area for a quieter meeting.

2. Large auditorium.

a. If people are seated in rows, three people turn around and discuss with three people behind them.

b. Use some other technique to form groups of six throughout the auditorium.

**Procedure**

1. Buzz sessions may be formed at the beginning of the meeting, or they may be initiated later. The leader announces the formation of buzz groups either by proximity of chairs, a common interest in specific discussion areas, or by a mechanism to distribute members, such as counting off 1 through 6 and having those with common numbers form a group.

2. Each group chooses a leader and a recorder.

3. The topic is introduced to the group for discussion, and people are encouraged to participate much as they would in any other small-group discussion.

4. The recorder keeps relevant thoughts ready to report back to the larger group. In the smaller meeting (24 people), each group might have the time to give a short report to the total group. In an auditorium 6-6 meeting, it might not be possible to have everyone report back. Allow a specific number of groups that indicate interest in doing so to report back to the total audience.

**Appropriate Topics**

1. Home-management tips

2. Feelings about childrearing

3. Discipline

4. Moral values

5. Vacation ideas on a budget

6. Solving problems around the home

7. Issues concerning school

8. Decisions that should be made concerning education

**Brainstorming Sessions**

Brainstorming is a unique method of active interaction by all members of the group. It promotes interchange, encourages lateral thinking, and facilitates expansion of thought. In brainstorming sessions, all contributions are accepted. Everyone is encouraged to suggest ideas and solutions. The participants may add to, combine, or modify other ideas, or they may introduce something new. There are no value judgments on the quality of suggestions. The free and open brainstorming session provides an environment that facilitates the production of a variety of ideas from the participants. Members who are reluctant to contribute during an open discussion because they are not sure their ideas are worthy have a guaranteed safe environment in which to contribute during brainstorming. Quantity of ideas is the object. Later, the ideas may be analyzed, judged as to quality, and reduced to selected items. The brainstorming technique, therefore, is excellent for stimulation of diversified thought and solutions to issues and problems. It also reinforces the socioemotional aspects of a group by accepting the contributions of all people freely.

**Setup**

1. Arrange chairs in a circle if the group has fewer than 30 members. A small group allows for more interaction.

2. Brainstorming may be used in a larger group with an auditorium arrangement of chairs. In that case, the entire group has difficulty participating, but the mechanism is effective for bringing forth a quantity of ideas and thoughts.

**Procedure**

1. The brainstorming session requires a leader and a recorder.

a. Appoint a recorder or ask for a volunteer.

b. Appoint a leader or assume the leadership role.

2. The leader begins the brainstorming session by explaining the rules and emphasizing that all contributions are wanted and accepted. Even if ideas seem unusual, all members should contribute. Ideas should be interjected as they occur.

3. The topic or issue is explained to the group.

4. The session is opened to contributions from the group.

5. The recorder writes on a board or piece of paper all the ideas that come from the group.

6. After a selected amount of time-4, 6, or 10 minutes, depending on the issue and the flow of ideas-the group may turn to analyzing all the suggestions and pulling out the ones that seem to answer the issue or problem best.

7. A summary of the solutions and ideas gained from brainstorming is reported by the leader.

8. If this is an action meeting, plans for action should be identified at this time.

**Appropriate Topics**

1. Ideas to solve problems-for example, subjects for meetings, summer activities

2. How to get your child to ... (eat or go to bed, ere.

3. Creative activities

4. Exploring your environment

5. Nutrition

6. Ways to improve relations at the school

7. Summer offerings for families

**Colloquies**

The colloquy is a panel discussion by an informed expert panel where members of the audience are encouraged by the chairperson to interject questions or comments during the presentation. This allows information pertinent to the audience's interests to be discussed during the main part of the presentation instead of waiting for a question-and-answer period after the presentation. A second form of the colloquy includes two sets panels, an expert panel and a lay panel. The lay panel uses the procedures for a panel discussion. The expert panel gives advice when called upon by the lay panel or when it thinks pertinent information is being overlooked.

**Setup**

**1.** For a single panel, place chairs behind tables that are turned so the members of the panel can make eye contact with one another.

2. For two panels-lay and expert-seat the chairperson in the center with one panel on the left and one on the right. Both sets of panel members should be facing slightly toward the center so they can see each other and the audience.

**Procedures**

1. Single-panel colloquy:

a. The leader or chairperson explains and clarifies the colloquy procedure to the audience.

b. The topic for discussion is introduced.

c. Panel members are introduced.

d. The chairperson offers a stimulating comment or question to start the discussion.

e. The chairperson encourages free interaction among panel members and takes questions and comments from the audience.

f. An open forum follows the conclusion of the panel discussion.

g. The leader summarizes and concludes the meeting.

2. Dual-panel colloquy:

a. The chairperson explains and clarifies the two-panel colloquy to the audience.

b. The chairperson introduces the subject for discussion.

c. The expert and lay panels are presented to the audience.

d. The leader starts the discussion with a stimulating remark or question .

e. As expert advice is needed, the second panel is called upon to contribute .

f. A question-and-answer period follows the presentation, with comments and questions from the audience answered and discussed by both the lay and expert panels.

g. The chairperson summarizes, thanks the participants, and concludes the colloquy.

**Appropriate Topics**

1. Dealing with your child's fears

2. Handling stress

3. Drug addiction and alcoholism

4. Helping exceptional children

5. Nutrition

**Dyad or Triad Interaction and Feedback**

During structured programs such as STEP and PET, interludes that allow the audience or participants to clarify, practice, and receive feedback on their interaction with others are beneficial. For example if parents and teachers were working to improve interaction during a conference, a sample statement would allow them to practice listening and other communication skills. If the topic were reflective listening, one member of the dyad or triad would share with the others an aspect or concern. The second person would answer with a reflective listening response. The third then would critique the response . Each member of a triad would have an opportunity to play each role: the speaker, listener, and observe.

**Setup**

1. Small group (up to 24).

a. Arrange chairs in a circle, semicircle, around tables.

b. Have participants arrange their chairs so two or three can communicate with each other.

2. Large auditorium.

a. Start at the beginning of the row and have the aisle person turn and discuss with the person to the right. Dyads or triads can formed all along each row.

**Procedure**

1. After a topic has been described or shown, stop the program and have the participants form dyads or triads.

2. Have the dyad or triad decide who will be the speaker, the listener, and the observer.

3. Describe a situation or problem that needs to be clarified or solved. Handouts describing situations are effective in large meetings.

4. Have the participants play out their parts.

5. The observer then critiques the statement response using positive reinforcement as well as suggestions.

**Appropriate Topics**

1. Communication

2. Behavior and misbehavior

3. Determination of problem ownership

4. Reflective and active listening

5. Natural and logical consequences